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The President's Daily Brief

28 July 1969

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I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

MIDDLE EAST

The Israelis have followed up last week's military activity with a pitch for calm along the Suez Canal. Gideon Rafael of the Foreign Office told a US Embassy officer on Sunday that the pronouncements of Mrs. Meir and others had been carefully worded to avoid the kind of extreme language that might "drive Nasir to excesses." In what seems sanctimonious double-talk to us, he claimed that the Israeli air strikes were essentially defensive actions to support the Israeli ground position.

Rafael went on to suggest that the Soviets should be asked to demonstrate their desire for calm by weighing in with Nasir. (We had, in fact, been wondering whether one aim of last week's raids was to soften up the Soviets for just such an approach by destroying large quantities of Soviet materiel in Egypt.) Whether Moscow will be in a mood to oblige the Israelis is a moot point. In a protest delivered in Tel Aviv on Sunday, the Soviets claimed that "Soviet navy vessels" had been "attacked" in a bombardment of Port Said on 20 July.

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II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

LAOS

Communist forces continue to press government outposts near the Plaine des Jarres, but there have been no new major attacks recently. To the west, along the Vientiane - Luang Prabang road, the enemy is probing shaky government defenses; it is unclear whether these small-scale attacks are designed to nudge government morale still lower or are the prelude to a more concerted effort to move into northern Vientiane Province.

Souvanna will be listening in Vientiane to many diverse recommendations on how best to deal with the Communist military pressure. However, there seems to be a growing consensus among the Lao that further Communist advances will have to be dealt with by diplomatic, not military, initiatives.

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PAKISTAN

In a major speech on Monday, President Yahya Khan made it clear he is in no hurry to end martial law. Although he announced the setting up of certain machinery to prepare for elections, he warned that such controversial issues as a new constitution and autonomy for East Pakistan should be resolved before elections. This could take years.

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